

Alana Benson

-30°, or, Emily Dickinson Unhinged

What about the kid?

It's time the kid got free.

- The Love Club

Acidic glow Grows wariness—
but Go—so what of a Girlish scare?
Lights suggest a happy house—Strain
and trace the Walls of a nightmare—

Dangerous Temperatures—
they cry, and call for cold,
Hesitations—and Me—couched—
looking at you look Old.

Only I sat up all night—pitched,
Bare, and Barely sheltered
from the Frozen Lake—you
were Gone—drowned

down your Own ice Hole, or
on a late-night ship of Pain
Perpetual—as She said, *you*
haven't stopped smoking all night.

Curtains of crystal hang outside,
crystal guillotines, Sublime—
Crowned, I wear my Fear—
caged and chained by Love Divine.

The Dog and I are left—gentled
by cushions and comforters—See
when you leave, my Mind returns,
Shamed by shackles, Utterly Un-Free.

On the Discovery of Pericles' Winecup in Kiffisia

July 30th, 2014

They found his cup
in the suburbs,
smashed—superb,
a one-of-a-kind find.

Someone
scrawled an *ostrakon*,
(were they plastered
when he was turned on?)

Ariphron
must've taken him out, hit
the bars with his brother
(I pity their departed mother).

His beard was probably
just growing in, head full of marble—
idealistic in his rich civility—
primed for democratic garble.

Did they tilt their chairs,
(woozy from the wine)
leave a souvenir behind,
autographed his family line?

May he have had one
night of peaceful host,
full of belly-laughs and
winestains, the future *strategos*.

Philhellenism

ἀνα-νεύω, f. –νεύσομαι or –νεύσω : aor. I ἀνένευσα :— *to throw the head back*, in token of denial (which we express by *shaking the head*), Hom., Hdt., etc. 2. c. acc. rei, *to deny, refuse*, Il.

λαοῖσιν δ' ἀνένευε καρῆατι δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς, οὐδ' ἔα ἰέμεναι ἐπὶ Ἑκτορι πικρὰ βέλεμνα, μή τις κῦδος ἄροιτο βαλῶν, ὃ δὲ δεύτερος ἔλθοι.

Achilles made signs to the Achaean host, and **shook his head** to show that no man was to aim a dart at Hector, lest another might win the glory of having hit him and he might himself come in second.

Iliad, Book 22, Line 205. Trans. by Samuel Butler

Are you hungry? I ask into space.
He clicks his tongue and I feel his face
nod up against the phone, beard crackling,

and a sweet, softly-accented cackling.
His hair and eyes are Turkish, dark,
but his *no* is Greek at its core, the arc

that sealed Achilles' accepted fate,
a true Hellenic, gestural trait.
My butcher knows it just the same,

it's how he tells me he's out of game.
Come back tomorrow, it's late, good God.
All this I get from a single nod.

The acquisition by the *barbaroi*
in tailcoats did not happen at Troy.
If it had they would have seen

the Swift Footed one's upturned mien.
Translators seem to prefer the gist—
why harry the half-blind Classicist?

Beloved and beautiful Athena, the cutthroat
(she's not so dangerous in a footnote):
now she sports an unyielding stench

of city in summer: a piss-covered bench,
home to pigeons and hornets, the shutters,
stray cats, and dirty gray gutters.

The signal, the nod, born in these streets
where teenaged boys push, jostle and compete,
and mothers chat across laundry lines,

hides between the jasmine vines.
The streets knew the secret, watched how
history buffs could disregard the marrow—

though the word alone betrays the deed
(the only Greece that they can see).
True, I, myself cannot fight the long-

learned indication—nurture's strong—
how nods and shakes have become
so innate as to make the motions drum

on without thought. And though all
of history is on his side, I'll forget the call,
boil more pasta rather than less,
simply because I thought he said yes.